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Technology-Rich Learning

Technology: Moving from No to Yes

Larry Ferlazzo

To help teachers take the next steps on using technology, share this wealth of online learning resources and easy tech tools.

A school superintendent recently suggested on his blog that teachers who don't incorporate technology into their classroom had better start "polishing up their resumes."¹ I'd make a different suggestion. Just as good teachers use encouragement, rather than threats, to help reluctant students learn, school leaders who want teachers to use more educational technology might try these time-tested steps from the world of community organizing:

- Build relationships, learning your colleagues' stories, goals, interests, and challenges.
- Share your own similar challenges and experiences.
- Describe how using education technology has helped you overcome those challenges—and might help that hesitant teacher as well.
- Offer some simple next steps.

As a teacher in a large high school, I work with tech-reluctant colleagues daily. As a blogger, I communicate with educators around the world who express hesitation about "messing with" their teaching practice by introducing high-tech hardware or exotic web tools. In my experience, the best way to move teachers from *no* to *yes* in terms of technology is to capture their attention and offer easy-to-do first steps. School leaders who hope to influence reluctant teachers should find ways that technology can both make things easier for teachers and benefit students' learning. Here are a few suggestions.

Use Computer Projectors and Document Cameras

More classrooms are now using computer projectors,² which give teachers easy access to education-related multimedia available online. Far fewer classrooms have digital document cameras, which can also be a great aid to instruction. A "doc cam" projects any text, image, or even three-dimensional object that's placed under it onto a screen in front of the room. This tool makes it easy to show student work or display a text that a teacher is reading aloud, among other uses—and it breaks teachers' dependency on the dreaded transparencies and overhead projectors.

Many document cameras cost close to \$400, but there are low-cost alternatives. Models as low as \$69 are coming into the market, and [an iPad can be turned into a document camera](#) for less than \$40.

Maximize the Use of Video

Some willing teachers still face an obstacle to using multimedia that they find online in lessons: Many districts don't let teachers access YouTube. However, there are alternatives for teachers who cannot pull YouTube, Vimeo, and other services into their classrooms.

- [Zamzar](#) lets anyone download a YouTube video to a computer.
- [Teacher Tube](#) and [School Tube](#) have thousands of education videos that are unlikely to be blocked.
- YouTube has an [education section](#) that's walled-off from its entertainment areas (so districts may feel more comfortable giving teachers access).
- The school-friendly site [Awesome Stories](#) offers many prescreened, safe educational videos.
- Major news channels like CNN, NBC, and ABC have online news videos. Outlets like The History Channel and *National Geographic* provide similar resources.
- One feature of news videos is a great advantage for teachers of English language learners, hearing-impaired students, and others with special needs. The Federal Trade Commission has begun requiring closed-captioning in online videos. The news divisions for NBC and ABC are already [incorporating closed captions in their videos](#).

If a school or district does allow access to YouTube, tools like these help teachers use it best:

- [Veengle](#) lets teachers create preloaded "playlists" of videos to show in class. Veengle also makes it easy to crop any video so a teacher can show only the most relevant portions.
- [Safe Share](#) lets anyone show a video from YouTube without showing the surrounding ads or comments.
- [Masher](#) and [Animoto](#) help teachers get kids into creating videos for curriculum-related projects and presentations. Teachers who videotape student presentations and skits can use such sites to share them with schoolmates, family, and friends (obtaining parent permission, of course).

Let Student Writers Reach Authentic Audiences

Students become more concerned with the quality of their writing when it's viewed by an audience besides their teacher. These strategies and web tools help develop such an audience:

Share student work with classmates.

Any document, including one in Microsoft Word, can be uploaded to the Internet with a free application like [TxtBear](#). Just click on your file and you'll receive a URL address that goes right to it. Once a teacher or student has that URL, he or she can easily share it in a variety of ways. A teacher might create a free class blog using [Edublogs](#) or [Kidblogs](#), write a general post about what the class is studying, and have students paste the URL addresses of their written pieces on that subject to the blog as comments. Other students can comment about classmates' posts.

Share student writing beyond the classroom.

There are many good websites on which students can share writing they've created for class with people throughout the world—with minimal work required from the teacher.

- Students can post their book reviews on safe sites like [Library Thing](#) and [others](#).
- The history site [Timelines](#) lets users contribute content (text, photos, and videos) to "timelines" of past events. People can vote on which timelines they like best, but everyone's contributions remain displayed.
- Students can add their comments about current events on most online websites that feature local, national, or international news. The *New York Times* has a ["Student Opinion" site](#) where students 13 and older can voice their views on the news.
- Why not develop a sister class relationship with students in other states or countries and have kids exchange writing? [Many sites](#) help teachers easily make such global connections for short or long-term projects

Help Students Become Better Readers

Reinforce reading strategies.

Many teachers encourage students to demonstrate their grasp of reading strategies by highlighting passages or writing in the margins of a text. Two great tools, [Webklipper](#) and [Bounce](#), let students do this digitally with online

material, using a virtual sticky note, visual marker, or drawing tool. An online page annotated in this way can be e-mailed to someone or posted on a class blog.

[Into The Book](#) introduces and reinforces reading strategies in an engaging, interactive way.

Make reading more engaging.

Some sites let a user identify topics that interest him or her and then provide a continually updated, attractive display of articles on those topics, personalized to that user and readable on a computer or mobile device. [Trapit](#), [Pulse](#), and [Muse360](#) are all excellent.

I like Muse360 because it lets users make these "personalized newspapers" public; students can not only read what they like, but also share their favorite passages or texts with classmates—and sample what their classmates are reading. The articles are typically generated from reputable news sources so that no inappropriate articles will show up, and this content typically isn't blocked by school content filters.

- My students find these news sites particularly attractive and engaging: [USA Today's recently redesigned site](#), MSNBC's [Spectra Visual](#) feature, and [Newsmap](#), which displays the news on a colorful grid.
- [Awesome Stories](#) has a huge collection of nonfiction stories about history, film, and other topics.

Try these tools for readers with special needs.

- For English language learners, sites like [English Central](#), [Online TPR](#), and [USA Learns](#) are both popular and effective.
- For struggling readers, try [Starfall](#), [GCF Learn Free](#), [BBC Bitesize](#), and [Reading Bear](#). The website [SpeEdChange](#) shares other good online resources.

Enhance Social Studies

Countless web resources can reinforce any social studies lesson in an engaging way.

Geography

- [The Google World Wonders Project](#) and the [Google Street View](#) Collection provide virtual field trips around the world.
- [Stay.com](#) lets students create virtual trips of their own.

History

- [McDougal Littell's Class Zone](#) has animated maps, online activities, and animations—all with audio support for the text. Click on a subject and a state, and you'll be amazed at what the site offers.
- [Mr. Nussbaum's site](#) contains an incredible number of resources on every aspect of U.S. History.
- [The Digital Vaults](#) from the National Archives are filled with historical and primary source materials. Teachers and students can use these public resources to create their own poster or movie.
- The [Time Map of World History](#) is an interactive map with accessible text that begins at 3500 BC.
- Two useful BBC sites are [Primary History](#) and [A History of The World](#).
- [Many textbook publishers](#) make multilingual summaries of chapters in social studies or science textbooks available. Even if the textbook that you're using doesn't offer this service, summaries from similar books often help English language learners.

The resources listed here should take any teacher or student (even a technology novice) no more than several minutes to grasp. By appealing to educators' desire to increase student interest in learning, gain new teaching skills, and avoid a lot of additional work on top of an already overloaded schedule, school leaders can introduce colleagues to meaningful technology integration—and strengthen collegial relationships at the same time.

Endnotes

¹ Baule, S. M. (n. d.) *Can technology replace teachers?* [blog post]. Retrieved from [Daily Insight](http://DailyInsight.com) at www.schoolcio.com/Default.aspx?tabid=136&EntryId=4694

² Nagel, D. (May 5, 2010). *Report: Mobile and classroom technologies surge in schools*. *THE Journal*. Retrieved from thejournal.com/articles/2010/05/05/report-mobile-and-classroom-technologies-surge-in-schools.aspx

[Larry Ferlazzo](#) teaches English and social studies at Luther Burbank High School in Sacramento, California. His latest book, *Self-Driven Learning: Teaching Strategies for Student Motivation*, will be published in spring 2013 by Eye on Education.

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